

# Army Officer Candidate Schools 78 Years of Excellence



“You have to lead men in war by requiring more from the individual than he thinks he can do. You have to lead men in war by bringing them along to endure and to display qualities of fortitude that are beyond the average man’s thought of what he should be expected to do. You have to inspire them when they are hungry and exhausted and desperately uncomfortable and in great danger; and only a man of positive characteristics of leadership, with the physical stamina that goes with it, can function under those conditions.” GEN George Marshall in testimony to Senate Military Affairs Committee in 1940.

In 1940, GEN George Marshall recognized the absolute importance of establishing rigorous training facilities for new officers. The Officer Candidate School (OCS) was established in early 1941 when the Secretary of War, the War Department and the Army Chief of Staff agreed that a training program was needed to quickly commission new officers. By the spring of 1941, the Selective Service draft had brought nearly a million men into the Army. Leadership was needed desperately and OCS stepped forward to fill that need, just as it has in every conflict or era since then.

The first class graduated in September 1941 at Fort Benning,

Georgia. Later that month, the War Department announced that OCS would be expanded to 10 branch schools—Infantry, Signal Corps, Armor, Artillery, Coast Artillery, Quartermaster, Medical Corps, Engineering, Cavalry, Ordnance—with an initial total enrollment of 2,300 men.

Those who survived the ordeal were commissioned second lieutenants—the famed “90-day wonders” of World War II. The momentous decision to start a shortened commissioning program proved to be very wise, as OCS became the leading source of commissioned officers during the war. Of the 800,000 or so officers who served in the Army during World War II, more than half were OCS graduates and well over half the combat leaders were products of that system.

At the end of World War II, the troop level of approximately eight million was reduced to less than 20 percent of that strength in one year and down to seven percent in three years. Commensurate with that reduction, by the end of 1946 all OCS training was transferred to the Army Ground General School at Fort Riley, Kansas. Officer production slowed to a trickle until 1950.

The officer requirements of the Korean War resulted in the reactivation of six branch OCS programs in 1951: Infantry,





Photo courtesy U.S. Army

Every training event is approached with a “Crawl - Walk - Run” methodology. Here, candidates are developing communication and teamwork skills by controlling their movement as a team.

Artillery, Signal, Engineer, Ordnance and Antiaircraft. By the end of 1952, a combined total of 16,800 candidates had graduated from the six schools. Korea did not require as many new combat leaders because so many were available with World War II experience. All the reactivated schools except Infantry, Artillery and Engineer were closed by the end of 1952. The Engineer OCS closed in June 1954.

The Army expanded in 1965 from 1 million to 1.5 million to fight in Vietnam. The Army needed 40,000 to 50,000 new junior officers for this expanding force. ROTC production declined and West Point commissioning was slow, so six new OCS schools were opened—making eight in total—to produce the numbers needed for the Vietnam War.

During the height of the Vietnam conflict, Infantry OCS produced about 7,000 officers annually from three battalions at Fort Benning. It is estimated that more than 50 percent of the company grade officers who fought in Vietnam were OCS graduates. The program was reduced to two battalions toward the close of the conflict and presently maintains a single battalion. In April 1973, the Branch Immaterial Officer Candidate Course was created at Fort Benning to replace all other OCS courses except the Women’s Army Corps OCS which remained at Fort McClellan until 1976, when it too merged with the course at Fort Benning.

In the decades since the OCS branch immaterial program was implemented in 1973, OCS continues to provide commissioned officers to the total force for all basic branches of the Army. The demand for well-trained junior officers has expanded and contracted over the years to support major conflicts such as the 1991 Gulf War, peacekeeping operations in the Balkans, the Iraq War and continuing operations in Afghanistan. Overseas contingency operations continue, as U.S. forces are a vital part of the intervention against the Islamic State.

On 12 June 1998, to further integrate the total force, the Army National Guard OCS Phase III candidates began training alongside their active duty counterparts at Fort Benning. Officer

candidates from the National Guard conduct the final phase of training before commissioning during their two-week annual training period. Over 650 future officers were trained for the Army in the first year, with similar numbers being trained in subsequent years.

Notable and distinguished OCS graduates include Casper Weinberger, Secretary of Defense during the Reagan administration; Robert J. Dole, former U.S. Senator from Kansas and presidential candidate; John O. Marsh Jr., Secretary of the Army during the 1980s; William F. Buckley Jr., political commentator; Winthrop Rockefeller, former Governor of Arkansas; GEN John Shalikashvili, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; GEN Tommy Franks, former commander of U.S. Central Command; GEN Frederick Kroesen Jr., former commander Seventh United States Army;



Photo by Marleigh Horace, MCoE PAO Photographer

Bob Dole at an OCS graduation ceremony



